



A Report on the First Collaboration between the American National Election Studies and the National Longitudinal Surveys

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Overview

As part of our goal to promote new, more dynamic, and more interdisciplinary studies of voting and elections, the American National Election Studies (ANES) has embarked on a collaboration with the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS). This collaboration entails ANES purchasing time on two NLS surveys during the next three years. These purchases will allow questions of direct relevance to election scholars to appear on these well-known longitudinal studies for the first time.

What is the NLS?

The National Longitudinal Surveys are run by the Center for Human Resource Research (CHRR) at the Ohio State University. Since the 1960s, CHRR has conducted longitudinal surveys with nationally representative panels of adults and children. This work has been funded by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and other agencies. The ANES-NLS collaboration covers two of these surveys: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (known as the NLSY79) and the Children of the NLSY (CNLSY) Young Adult component.

ANES Opportunities to Collaborate with NLS

NLS has agreed to include up to four minutes of questions (the maximum amount available for purchase) in each of the 2006 and 2008 CNLSY surveys. In 2006, these questions will be administered to respondents ages 21 or older. In 2008, they will be administered to all Young Adult respondents, subject to OMB approval for those aged 15-20. ANES users will not only have access to all of the data collected on these respondents in 2006 and 2008, but also to all of the data collected *on these respondents in all previous years of the study*.

ANES is also invited to purchase one minute of interview time (the maximum amount available for purchase) on the 2008 survey of the NLSY79 respondents. This survey includes a large sample of adults, including the mothers of the CNLSY79 Young Adult respondents. All of the NLSY79 respondents have been interviewed many times in the past and they are scheduled to be interviewed many more times in the future. We expect to be able to ask about four questions in this one minute.

For both the CNLSY and NLSY79 studies, the ANES-NLS agreement allows ANES to propose questions on a relatively wide range of topics that would be of interest to election scholars. The nature of the NLS's funding and mandate, however, prevents ANES from asking

politically sensitive questions, including questions pertaining to respondent's past voting behavior or preferences over prospective candidates for elective office.

Together, these collaborations will allow scholars to link electorally-relevant and other socially-relevant responses across generations. Such linkages can be used to investigate many topics, including how participation and turnout depend on parent-child relations. The longitudinal nature of the NLS studies will further allow studies of how changes over the lifespan affect electorally relevant variables.

Details on the CNLSY

The CNLSY survey began in 1986 by collecting data biennially on all children born to female NLSY79 (an NLS panel study started in 1979) respondents. The number of children studied has increased from 4,971 in 1986 to 7,467 in 2002. In 2002, CNLSY respondents ranged in age from birth to 32 years. Beginning in 1994, Children under age 15 have completed various cognitive, socio-emotional, and physiological assessment instruments, and information about the child has been obtained from the child's mother as well.

Children of NLSY79 respondents who are at least 15 years old, referred to as "Young Adults," are regularly administered NLSY79-style questionnaires that gather information on a wide range of topics. The number of Young Adult respondents has grown as the CNLSY sample has aged, from 980 in 1994 to 4,238 in 2002. Standard measurements in the Young Adult survey include household structure, religious experiences, dating and marriage, schooling, military experience, employment, fertility, physical and mental health, income and financial assets, self-esteem, attitudes toward risk-taking, parent/child relations, computer use, substance use, criminal activity, sexual activity, participation in community activities, and cognitive skills.

The Value of This Collaboration

ANES views these invitations as exciting opportunities for social scientists to vastly expand the palette of measures with which we can correlate electorally-relevant attitudes and behaviors and to offer new opportunities to examine cross-generational correspondence. In addition, because we can administer the same questions in both the 2006 and 2008 CNLSY Young Adult surveys, ANES users will have a new source of panel data with which to test a broader range of important causal hypotheses. And like the ANES's own data collections, the NLSY79 and CNLSY datasets are public goods, available to all scholars.

If all goes well with these collaborations, it may be possible for ANES to purchase even more interview time on later surveys, though competition for inclusion in these questionnaires is likely to remain quite intense. Nonetheless, the NLS PIs have expressed great interest in exploring the electoral experiences of their respondents *for the first time*. They particularly appreciate doing it in partnership with ANES and the range of social scientists whose expertise it can bring to the topic. Since the NLS research community of scholars is composed primarily of economists, sociologists, and psychologists, we are also excited about the potential of this collaboration to considerably expand the interdisciplinary relevance of the study of elections.

Designing Our Questions for the 2006 CNLSY Questionnaire

In October of 2005, we were informed that the data collection dates for the 2006 study would be months earlier than was originally planned. Consequently, NLS needed our questions within an extremely short period of time. Since we, the PIs, had originally planned to choose the ANES-NLS questions after consulting with a broad community of scholars, we faced an important decision. We could select questions for the 2006 CNLSY survey using a more rushed consultation than we had imagined. Alternatively, we could ask CHRR to revise the agreement and postpone the collaboration until such time (2008) when we could base our questions on a more extensive consultation. We presented the matter to a range of advisors, including program officers at NSF. Among us there was a consensus that it was in the best interest of the broad scholarly community that ANES serves to begin the collaboration now and live with a limited consultation process for the 2006 study.

We negotiated an extension of the originally requested deadline for submitting questions to NLS (to November 8, 2005). Then we distributed broadly a call for assistance via email to various communities of scholars. Our email described our situation, presented our deadline, and provided examples of the kinds of questions that could be asked. About these questions we said:

“Since time is short, we are jumpstarting the conversation with a list of questions for you to consider. While you should not feel a need to privilege these questions if you think that they are suboptimal, they do arise from previous interactions with NLS. In particular, we know these questions to be at the intersection of topics that fit within ANES’s mandate, have great potential to be of use to many scholars, and that NLS is willing to include. If you would like to propose other questions, we are willing to listen.

“This list includes more than four minutes of questions. While we are capable of reducing this list to four minutes now, we prefer to base such choices on as much expert input as we can gather. So please convey to us your thoughts about how best to use the four minutes. This many involve: rank ordering the questions we have submitted, offering different questions, or some combination of the two activities.”

“When making these suggestions, please keep the special attributes of the NLS data collection strategy (described below) in mind. It is also our hope that quite a few of the questions that we place on the 2006 study will appear again on future CNLSY studies so that the user community may benefit from that data collection’s longitudinal aspects.”

After distributing this invitation, we did not have to wait long for feedback. The response was tremendous. We received advice from nearly 100 scholars representing over 55 universities and other organizations.

We were delighted by the broad willingness of our colleagues to contribute to the new ANES endeavor under rather extreme time pressure. Appendix A of this letter lists every person from whom we received an e-mail. We thanked each of these individuals at the time of their submissions, and we do so again with this report. The questions on the first ANES-NLS

collaboration are the fruits of your labor, and we learned a great deal from the range and depth of your ideas.

While the suggestions that scholars suggested totaled had well over 400 minutes of question time, our limit remained four minutes. To develop the final list, we spent many hours reading every e-mail, following up to learn more about issues raised, consulting ancillary materials, and more. Our goal was to select questions that had broad support among the community of scholars, solid theoretical and empirical justifications, and fit the opportunity to facilitate intergenerational and longitudinal dynamics of electorally relevant phenomena. Within a few days, consistent with the schedule we had negotiated with NLS, we submitted a list of questions.

Over the next few weeks, NLS programmed their questionnaire in preparation for fielding. We talked with their staff frequently about the nature of the questions we had proposed and altered some of them to make them more suitable for NLS instruments while retaining their electoral relevance. After a timing test was conducted by NLS staff, we were asked to choose a subset of the list we initially proposed. After several rounds of refinement, we reached agreement on a final set of questions. These questions appear in Appendix B of this letter. We are happy to report that the study was put into the field earlier this month.

In the following section, we explain why some questions will appear on the 2006 study while others will not. Regarding the questions that will not appear, a big part of the explanation is that four minutes is not a lot of time. Beyond staying away from questions that solicit open-ended responses, the time constraint does not permit much flexibility regarding how many questions we could include. As a result, we consider many of the questions that we could not include as having great potential. We hope that these ideas can be incorporated in some other of ANES's future data collections. To this end, we encourage scholars to continue developing ideas for future studies (our 2006 pilot study, our 21-month panel study that will begin in September of 2007, and our 2008 presidential study). Over the next few years, we will have hundreds of available minutes for a wide range of electorally-relevant questions.

Scholars who are interested in making such proposals can do so through the ANES Online Commons, a new website that will allow ANES to base survey designs on more rigorous collective evaluations and broader sets of comments than ever before. The OC will allow any interested scholar to submit suggestions in a way that is transparent to everyone involved. Scholars may write proposals advocating for the inclusion of new questions in the questionnaires or suggesting that ANES continue to ask questions that have been asked in the past or suggesting that particular questions not be asked again. Each proposal will be posted online so they can be viewed by anyone. And if you register online to participate in the OC, you will become eligible to post comments about each proposal. In response to new ideas, a proposal's author may update or revise his or her proposal. We and the Board of Overseers will respond to these proposals at the close of the OC, and we will use this information to inform our choices. We expect that the Online Commons will help to improve the scientific and social relevance of ANES data collections. The first version of the OC, which is dedicated to the development of our 2006 Pilot Study, will open in just a few weeks.

The Content of the 2006 ANES-NLS Collaboration

The 17 questions that ANES placed on the 2006 CNLSY address partisanship, turnout, and participation, as well as variables that may be useful in explaining turnout and participation. To leverage the scholarly potential in linking data from NLS parents and children, we included questions about respondents' perceptions of their parents' partisanship and about how often their parents discussed politics when the respondents were growing up. Following the advice of many scholars, we also included questions on perceptions about governmental responsiveness, political efficacy, the role of core values and trust, and the extent to which people follow politics in the news.

We considered many other questions that, in the end, we could not include. Of particular note are excluded questions for which scholars gave particularly detailed and compelling arguments. While we looked for consensus across scholars with many interests, we were particularly swayed by arguments based on hard evidence – such as results from previous surveys or strong theory. Many of the most informative the comments we received pertained to question wording, and the best ways to elicit certain kinds of data.

Since some of the questions that we could not include were mentioned by many who contacted us, we want to discuss some of these decisions here. In general, we could not include questions that would occupy much or all of the available four minutes. So, for example, questions that would elicit potentially long open-ended responses and proposals for measuring concepts that required long batteries of questions entailed prohibitively high opportunity costs. Given the many uses to which the ANES-NLS data can be put, we chose not to include questions about which there was substantial disagreement about optimal measurement or value.

These factors are among the reasons that we could not include any measures of news media exposure (an outcome that we consider disappointing). We received multiple suggestions about how to measure media usage. Some scholars advocated simple questions, whereas others advocated asking extended batteries of questions about different mediums and kinds of content. An extensive battery would have consumed the entire four minutes, and there was considerable disagreement about what questions to include. This topic is one of many about which we hope to see cogent arguments appear on the Online Commons later this year, so we can reach some consensus on a desirable approach.

The questionnaire does not measure self-reports of liberal-conservative ideology. We also made this decision with regret. But it is based on the following notion: Since the 1960s, we have known that many Americans are willing to identify themselves as liberals, conservatives, or moderates, but they disagree sharply about what these terms mean. Some people define these words in terms of willingness to embrace social change; other people define them in terms of morality; others define them in terms of the size and interventionist quality of government that they desire; and so on (thanks, of course, go most to Phil Converse for this insight). In the end, when a respondent says he or she is a liberal or a conservative, it is reasonable to question whether we, as researchers, know what he or she means. We were reluctant to include the standard ideology question in the CNLSY without an opportunity to conduct a further inquiry into its meaning. By contrast, the institutionalization of party as an organizing force (and a brand

name) in electoral and legislative contexts give standard partisanship measures greater construct validity, so we are measuring party identification.

We received mixed input on whether to include questions measuring attitudes toward specific policy options. Although questions about currently topical policies are of immediate interest, the possibility of comparing 2006 responses with those in future NLS surveys made us particularly conscious of whether proposed questions would likely be of central relevance to respondents and scholars in future years. Some scholars expressed strong opinions about which policies are central to the American democratic experience, but we found no evidence of a scholarly consensus on which policies would be most useful to measure in this context, and we could only afford to measure one or two at most. The strongest support was expressed for attitudes toward abortion, and a question sequence on this topic was on the list we initially submitted to CNLS, but it did not make the final cut.

Conclusion

We are very grateful to the many scholars who helped us think through the question selection process. Although the circumstances were not optimal in terms of the time available to consult with you, your enthusiasm for improving the scientific study of elections was very heartening to us. We will have more and bigger opportunities in the future to convert your suggestions into high-quality survey data, and we look forward to the opportunity to work with you.

We also want to take this opportunity to thank the National Science Foundation, who not only supplied the funding for this collaboration but also had the initial vision for it. And we thank the wonderful staff of the CNLSY for their patience with us in making this opportunity into a reality.

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Appendix A. List of Contributors to the ANES-NLS Call for Advice (11/1-8/2005)

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Appendix B. ANES Questions for the 2006 CNLS Young Adult Survey

Below are the questions to be included in the 2006 CNLSY survey. Below some questions, we have inserted notes to explain how the question will be administered or why it will be asked in a particular way.

1. In talking to people about elections, we often find that a lot of people were not able to vote because they were sick or they just didn't have time or for some other reason. Which of the following statements best describes you: One, I did not vote in the 2004 U.S. presidential election. Two, I thought about voting in the 2004 U.S. presidential election, but didn't. Three, I usually vote, but didn't vote in the 2004 U.S. presidential election. Or four, I am sure I voted in the 2004 U.S. presidential election.

1. I DID NOT VOTE IN THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
2. I THOUGHT ABOUT VOTING IN 2004, BUT DIDN'T
3. I USUALLY VOTE, BUT DIDN'T IN 2004
4. I AM SURE I VOTED

2. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as {ROT_PARTY}, an Independent, or what?

In this question, the placeholder {ROT_PARTY} is for the terms "Democrat" or "Republican." The order in which these terms appear in the question is rotated randomly to reduce response order effects. So, some respondents hear "Republican" first, while others hear "Democrat" first.

2A. A strong {party} or a not very strong {party}?

In this version of the follow up question, respondents who answered "Republican" or "Democrat" are asked about the strength of their partisan attachment.

2B. What party?

In this version of the follow-up question, respondents who did not choose one of the parties in the initial question are given an opportunity to enter another party name.

2C. Do you think of yourself as {ROT_CLOSER}, or equally close to both?

This version of the follow-up is asked of respondents who indicated no party preference. ROT_CLOSER is a place holder for the term "closer to the

Democratic party, closer to the Republican party" or its inverse. Again, the order is rotated randomly to reduce response order effects.

3. How often do you follow what's going on in politics? Always, most of the time, about half the time, once in a while, or never.

To reduce response order effects, on questions with this set of responses we rotate responses so that some respondents read

4. How often does the federal government do what most Americans want it to do? Always, most of the time, about half the time, once in a while, or never.

5. How often is politics so complicated that you don't really understand what's going on? Always, most of the time, about half the time, once in a while, or never.

6. Do you think that people should have to work hard in order to get ahead in life, or should people be able to get ahead in life without having to work hard?

Following the logic stated above, the order of this question and the next are rotated randomly.

7. Do you think that every American should have the same opportunities to succeed in life, or that it's ok for some people to have more opportunities to succeed than others do?

8. Generally speaking, how often can you trust other people? Always, most of the time, about half the time, once in a while, or never.

9. During the last two years, did you ever work as a volunteer for a political candidate running for national, state, or local office and got no pay at all or only a very small amount of pay for your work, or did you never do this?

10. During the last two years, did you ever contribute money to a political candidate, a political party, a political action committee, or any other organization that supported political candidates, or did you never do this?

11. During the last two years, did you ever work with others in your community or neighborhood to deal with some community issue or problem, or did you never do this?

12. During the last two years, did you ever contact a government official in person, by phone, or by letter about a problem or issue, or did you never do this?

13. When you were growing up, how often did you hear the adults in your household talking about politics? Always, most of the time, about half the time, once in a while, or never.

14. When you were growing up, did your mother think of herself mostly as {ROT_PARTY}, an Independent, or what?

14 A. What party?

15. How often did she follow what was going on in politics? Always, most of the time, about half the time, once in a while, or never.

16. Think about your father, stepfather, or someone else who was most like a father to you when you were growing up. Did he think of himself mostly as {ROT_PARTY}, an Independent, or what?

16 A. What party?

17. How often did he follow what was going on in politics? Always, most of the time, about half the time, once in a while, or never.

NOTE: Mother and father questions are asked differently here because in order to enter the sample, CNLSY respondents must have had a mother figure who is known to the CNLSY researchers, whereas some respondents did not have a father figure growing up.